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Virtual Reality Arrives in California Libraries

Sacramento, Calif. — Libraries have long served as a place to explore new subjects and learn about the world. A new collaboration between the California State Library and Oculus VR, a division of Facebook Inc., will bring virtual reality technology to patrons in nearly half of the library jurisdictions throughout California.

“Oculus is proud of our work with the California State Library and Califa to make virtual reality technology available through local libraries,” said Cindy Ball, program manager for Oculus Education. “Californians will gain access to a wide range of enhanced services, from curriculum that takes students into outer space to providing hands-on training in skills like engine repair and beyond.”

“Virtual Reality is a generational leap in the services that our libraries provide” said California State Librarian Greg Lucas. “Just as computers have become a critical part of our libraries, this generous gift from Facebook and Oculus will bring new technology to libraries from Redding to San Diego.”

Each of the participating library systems will be awarded one or two Rifts and Oculus Ready PCs from Facebook and Oculus free of charge. Alongside the virtual reality equipment, libraries will be provided online training and the opportunity to also receive free or reduced cost virtual reality programs and equipment. Libraries will receive their equipment and training this month and will be able to begin offering virtual reality programs in late June or early July.

This project is managed by Califa, a nonprofit, and is supported in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act.

“I think this VR project demonstrates what libraries do so well with new technologies,” said Paula MacKinnon, Interim Director of Califa, the non-profit managing the project. “We start curating the exceptional, the compelling, and the intriguing educational content that is newly being published and provide our communities with the means to enjoy it— for free.”

Partial funding also comes from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act.

John MacLeod, Executive Director of New Media Learning, which developed the pilot project of this new system at the Marin County Free Libraries, noted that the arrival of this new technology in California libraries will not only benefit Californians, but also the companies pioneering the new technology.

“There will be a community space where people can come together, experience virtual reality, and help shape how that medium will be developed over the coming years” said MacLeod.

Check here to [see if your library jurisdiction](#) is a part of the Virtual Reality Experience Project.

Califa is a not-for-profit membership cooperative serving libraries and information organizations in California. Established in 2004 with LSTA funding from the California State Library, Califa collaborates with members and provides leadership for cooperative negotiations to help ensure that members receive quality information resources.

About the State Library: Founded in 1850, the California State Library has an extensive collection of documents from and about the state’s rich history, ranging from books, maps, miners’ diaries, newspapers and periodicals to photographs, paintings and posters. The State Library also holds federal and state publications and is home to both the Bernard E. Witkin State Law Library and the Braille and Talking Book Library. www.library.ca.gov